

Brandeis

Heller

{ A MAGAZINE FOR THE
HELLER SCHOOL FOR
SOCIAL POLICY AND
MANAGEMENT }

THE ACADEMIC ADVOCATE

INTRODUCING HELLER'S NEW
DEAN, DAVID WEIL

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Contents



02 LETTER FROM THE DEAN

03 HELLER NEWS

Maria Madison Becomes First Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; New Director of the Segal Citizen Leadership Program; Lurie Institute Launches the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities; Ambassador William Swing, Director General of International Organization for Migration, Speaks at the Heller School

08 THE ACADEMIC ADVOCATE

The Heller School welcomed David Weil, workplace and labor policy expert and former Obama appointee, as the school's dean in August 2017

14 CONNECTING THE DOTS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

From policing to substance abuse to recidivism and re-entry, Heller MPP researchers and alumni strive for change at every level of the justice system

20 WORKAROUND

WorkAround provides economic empowerment to refugees through online employment: a social enterprise founded by three Heller alumnae

26 HELLER'S HOMEGROWN GLOBAL AMBASSADOR

Ravi Lakshmikanthan builds connections for alumni around the world

30 PERSPECTIVES: TATJANA MESCHEDÉ

Homelessness is, foremost, a housing problem

34 ALUMNI MILESTONES

Joseph Wronka's Career in Human Rights

Pushpita Samina Shares the Value of an MS Degree in Bangladesh

Nicole McCauley Is Powering Business by Empowering People

Alexandra Bastien's Career in Equitable Asset-Building

FROM THE DEAN }

Greetings,

I am pleased to write my first letter as the new dean of the Heller School. I feel very fortunate to be a part of this vibrant community, and I appreciate your warm wishes as I begin my work here. I am delighted to join an institution that embraces a deep commitment to “Knowledge Advancing Social Justice.” Although I am still in the process of learning and listening, I would like to share some early thoughts on beginning the next chapter for our school.



This difficult historic moment demands that we translate our aspirations to address social justice into our core research, education and outreach work. We must pursue research that addresses critical issues such as income inequality and health care access, research that creates scholarly insight, influences policy discussions and breaks ground on innovative solutions. That will require us to attract, develop and retain a new generation of talented and creative faculty and researchers to work alongside those who have shaped Heller to date.

Our next chapter also requires us to expand our diverse, idealistic and talented pool of graduate students and to equip them with tools and frameworks at Heller to then

pursue impactful careers. That will require us to assess the strengths of our academic programs and explore opportunities to improve them. Successful graduates doing important work not only further our mission but also create virtuous circles that will advance our efforts to recruit talented students.

We must also address perceived gaps between our social justice aspirations and how we function as a community. Strong communities are places where people are challenged, nurtured, engaged and feel included. Strengthening Heller’s community has therefore been a priority for me from the day I arrived. Critical to that effort was hiring our first associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion, Maria Madison. Maria and I look forward to working with faculty, researchers, staff and students to review and implement changes that will move us forward and eventually make Heller a model of diversity, equity and inclusion.

We have a lot to do as we begin our next chapter, and I have great confidence in our ability to do so. I look forward to hearing your ideas on how we can build stronger ties with you as we move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Weil". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David Weil
Dean and Professor

HELLER'S FIRST ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

BY **BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17**

In October, Heller welcomed Maria Madison as the school's first associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion. Madison has more than 20 years' experience in evidence-based research and management, especially in the design and implementation of clinical trials. Throughout her career, she has managed multidisciplinary, multicultural teams in challenging settings and consistently engaged with social justice issues.

Madison currently holds an adjunct faculty position at the University for Global Health Equity in Kigali, Rwanda. She is also the founder and president of the Robbins



MARIA MADISON

House Inc., a historic home and nonprofit organization focused on raising awareness of African-American history in Concord, Massachusetts.

"I am honored to join the staff at Brandeis' prestigious Heller School for Social Policy and Management," says Madison. "In particular, I look forward to helping the school embody and promote social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion at all levels."

Search committee chair and Senior Fellow Cathy Burack says, "Maria comes to Heller as a scholar, researcher, educator and practitioner. She has led and managed a nonprofit, works globally, knows health, education and policy, and has an unwavering commitment to social justice. In short, I think she *is* Heller, and is uniquely qualified to help us be the diverse, equitable and inclusive place we strive to be."

This position was largely advocated for by Heller students, many of whom participated in Ford Hall 2015, a 12-day student sit-in protesting a lack of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at Brandeis. Mark Brimhall-Vargas, the university's chief diversity officer, said, "I see Maria as an invaluable ally and resource in my own university-wide efforts to make the institution more responsive to the diverse communities who call Brandeis home. She will be a true partner in bringing about the real, systemic change that the Heller community has been looking for."

In this new position, Madison will help cultivate an environment at Heller that champions diversity, equity and inclusion in pedagogy, curriculum, research, faculty development, and systems and procedures. This is the first major hire for Heller Dean David Weil, who joined the school in August and regarded this decision as a high priority.

Weil says, "Maria Madison brings a remarkable professional background, academic training and personal experience that make her an outstanding choice. I believe Maria brings the expertise needed to ask tough questions about how we recruit and retain students, and how we hire, train, promote and develop faculty and staff at Heller. Her work will push us forward on these critical issues and help us eventually to become a model for diversity, equity and inclusion among our peers in higher education."

NEW DIRECTOR OF THE SEGAL CITIZEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

BY **MAX PEARLSTEIN '01**

Susanna “Susie” Flug-Silva joined Heller’s Center for Youth and Communities as the new director of the Eli J. and Phyllis N. Segal Citizen Leadership Program in August.

The Segal Program’s mission is to promote citizen leadership as an imperative for our nation. The program was established in 2007 to honor and extend the work of Eli Segal ’64, who is best known for his leadership developing AmeriCorps and Welfare-to-Work initiatives in the Clinton administration and for his talent for inspiring young people. The program commemorates this legacy, advances Segal’s passion for citizen engagement and continues Eli and Phyllis’ commitment to developing new generations of citizen leaders. With nearly 100 fellows today at different ages and stages, and a network of more than 600 founders, coaches and internship partners, the program is celebrating its 10th year of operation at Brandeis.

Flug-Silva comes to Brandeis from the Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA), where she managed the Commonwealth Corps year-of-service program. During her five years at MSA, she directed the supervision, training, reflection, technical assistance and team-building for 40 to 50 service members and 15 to 20 host site partners across Massachusetts each year.

Flug-Silva brings over 15 years of experience in the civic engagement, service/service learning, community partnerships and education policy worlds. Prior to MSA, she served as the youth services planner for the City of Cambridge’s Department of Human Service Programs and as a family engagement consultant for the National

College Advising Corps at Brown University. She managed community partnerships and service learning programming at Simmons College and Phillips Academy Andover, and fostered civic engagement programming at the national level at Idealist.org/COOL. She currently chairs Cambridge’s Citizens’ Committee on Civic Unity.

“It is an honor to take on the role of director,” says Flug-Silva. “I’m thrilled to continue to promote the legacy and work of the Segal family, the Segal Fellows, and the larger network of those who know the power of service and citizen leadership and the importance of fostering social justice.”

Flug-Silva recently completed a certificate in nonprofit management and leadership at Boston University’s Questrom School of Business. She holds an AM in urban education policy from Brown University and an AB in social studies from Harvard University, where she graduated magna cum laude and wrote an honors thesis on Boston’s living wage legislation.

“Susie brings important strengths and experience to the Segal Program as it begins its second decade,” says Phyllis N. Segal, founding chair of the Segal Program. “I am looking forward to her leadership and couldn’t be more thrilled to welcome her to our extended family of fellows, founders and friends.”

Susan P. Curnan, director of the Center for Youth and Communities, says that Flug-Silva emerged as the leading candidate from among more than 60 applicants. “She brings dedication to our mission, demonstrated effectiveness as a leader in civic engagement and is just what we need to spark innovation and growth in the next decade.”

Flug-Silva takes over as Segal Program director from Tam Emerson, who held the role for five years. Emerson, who left Brandeis to pursue an MBA at UC Berkeley, is a Segal Fellow herself and will remain engaged with the program while building her new career.

LURIE INSTITUTE LAUNCHES THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER FOR PARENTS WITH DISABILITIES

First-of-its-kind web portal provides trainings, resources, toolkits and more

BY **BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17**

In recent decades, people with disabilities have become increasingly integrated into mainstream employment, education, housing and public life in the United States. Among them, a growing number are choosing to become parents, and yet they encounter a lack of support and increased discrimination when they do so.

The Lurie Institute for Disability Policy has identified a scarcity of information about parenting with a disability, both for parents themselves and for advocates, policy-makers, health care professionals, family members, legal professionals, child welfare workers and social workers.

In response to this critical information gap, Lurie Institute Interim Director Monika Mitra and a team of researchers launched a web-based resource hub called the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities (centerforparentswithdisabilities.org). This website is the product of a five-year grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research, and its huge coalition of collaborators includes an advisory board of parents with disabilities, research partners at eight universities and dissemination partners at 15 national advocacy and professional organizations.



MONIKA MITRA, MICHELLE TECHLER AND ROBYN POWELL OF THE LURIE INSTITUTE



SUSANNA "SUSIE" FLUG-SILVA

The project has three main prongs, says Mitra. “One is conducting research — building a body of evidence and systematically analyzing existing state legislation that applies to parents with disabilities. The second piece is developing a knowledge base of interventions, and the third is disseminating resources to a broad set of stakeholders. We want to be inclusive of parents with a very diverse set of disabilities, as well as attorneys, judges, child welfare professionals, social workers and so forth.”

The team is also deeply committed to inclusiveness and accessibility for people with a broad range of disabilities. “Everything we write, we look at through the lens of accessibility, including for people with intellectual disabilities, and we structure it so that it’s appropriate for cross-disability support as well,” says Michelle Techler, Lurie Institute assistant director.

“Resources are useless if you can’t actually access them,” adds Robyn Powell, a PhD candidate and Lurie Institute research associate. “That’s also why we’re making sure that all of our resources are fully accessible to people with diverse disabilities as well as free.”

“Until now, there’s been no centralized hub for this diverse set of stakeholders,” says Mitra. “With this website, whether you’re a social worker, a policy wonk in a state senator’s office or a parent with a disability, you can come here and get an array of relevant information. And we know from our research that people from all of these different groups really want this information. There’s a real gap here, and this is one way to fill it.”

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM SWING, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION, SPEAKS AT THE HELLER SCHOOL

BY **BETHANY ROMANO, MBA’17**

The Master’s in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence (COEX) Program welcomed Ambassador William Swing, director general of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a related organization of the United Nations, to the Heller School on Sept. 18. Swing joined students, faculty and staff for a brief visit and public remarks, returning later that day to New York City to attend the annual U.N. General Assembly.

Alain Lempereur, COEX program director, noted in his introduction that during his tenure, the IOM has “brought millions of people to a place of safety and protection, and Bill was instrumental to that.”



AMBASSADOR WILLIAM SWING

Swing was elected to a 10-year term after retiring from the U.S. State Department, where he served as the United States ambassador to six different countries. He was most recently ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He also served as ambassador to Liberia, Nigeria, Haiti, the People's Republic of the Congo, and, notably, South Africa during that country's transition out of the notorious apartheid regime.

In his remarks, Swing described the breadth and scope of international and internal migration, which is larger today than ever before in history. At the same time, he has witnessed an escalation of armed conflicts, anti-migrant sentiment and xenophobia. "We can do better than this," he said. "We are, in some ways, in the middle of a perfect storm. But if you're in the middle of a storm, you should go for the high ground. That means prioritizing saving human life."

Swing also advocated "demythologizing migration," citing various ways in which common rhetoric around migrants and refugees is untrue. Most African migrants, for example, have no intention or desire to emigrate to Europe. He also saw a serious need to decouple the Western narrative linking migrants with terrorism.

"Another priority has to be a more creative and resourceful view of how we govern people and mobility," he said. "There are not enough legal pathways for people to migrate. We're not creative enough, in part because we are fearful."

"We must seek to balance the question of national sovereignty and individual liberty. We must balance national security and human security. How do you get that balance right? It's very important," said Swing.

"I'll conclude with one thought," he said. "Migration is not a problem to be solved — it is a human reality to be managed, and responsible leaders are managing it."

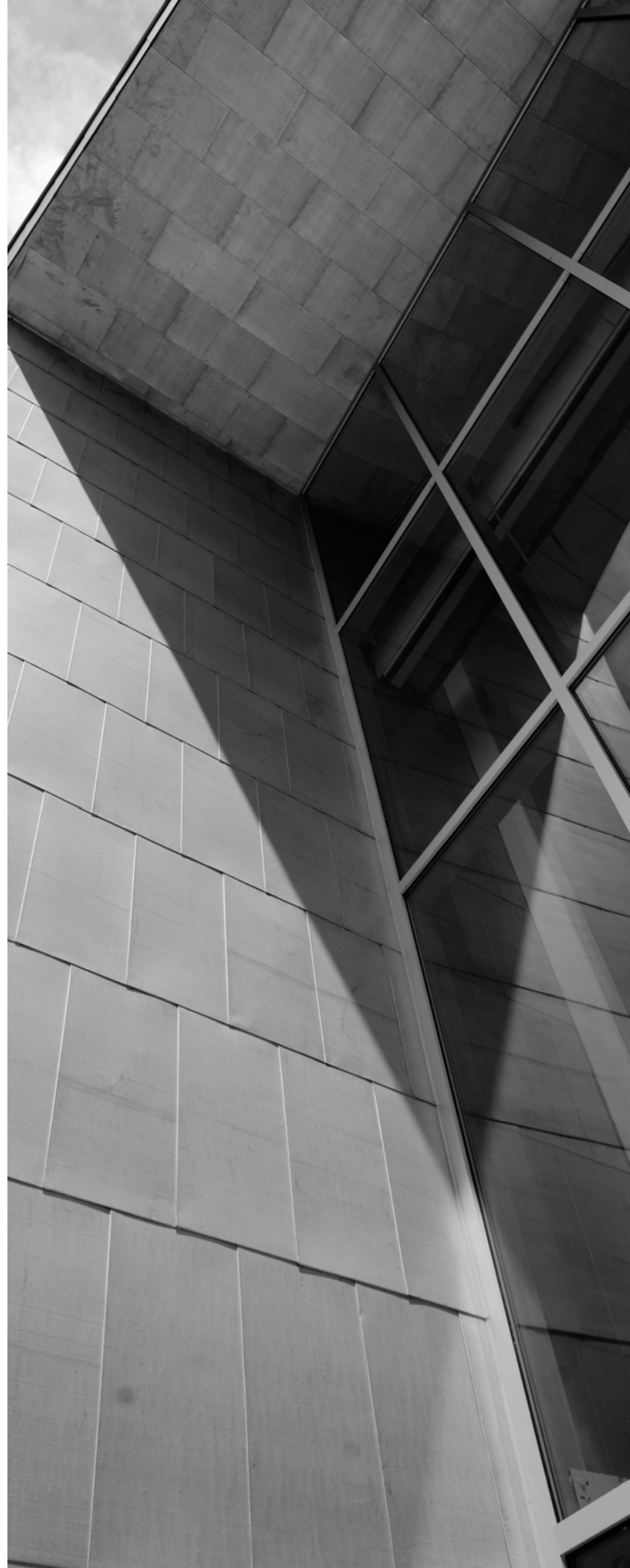




PHOTO: LIZ LINDER PHOTOGRAPHY

THE ACADEMIC ADVOCATE

THE HELLER SCHOOL WELCOMED DAVID WEIL, WORKPLACE AND LABOR POLICY EXPERT AND FORMER OBAMA APPOINTEE, AS THE SCHOOL'S DEAN IN AUGUST 2017

In the winter and spring of 1979, when most of his friends were in their senior year of high school in his hometown of Greeley, Colorado, 17-year-old David Weil was a thousand miles from home, loading food and supplies into trucks in California's Imperial Valley. He had dropped out of high school and taken a job with the National Farm Workers Ministry to support the United Farm Workers, who were on strike to promote fair labor practices.

BY BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17

In an ideal system, we should prevent workers from experiencing wage theft or other abuses in the first place.

He's slow to bring it up in our interview, but it's clear that this experience impacted him greatly. The United Farm Workers, a labor union cofounded by activists Dolores Huerta and César Chávez, organized thousands of mostly migrant Latino farm workers to strike and bargain for fair wages and better working conditions from the 1960s to the 1980s. The unjust violation of these fundamental rights was a deeply compelling cause to young Weil.

As a high school student, "I was a bit of a firebrand," he admits, somewhat sheepishly. "Really, I was a handful. I wanted to get out of this little agricultural town I had grown up in, and there was always discussion about social issues and social policy at our kitchen table growing up. So I ended up loading trucks in southern California for six months."

Those kitchen table conversations shaped Weil's worldview. He speaks with great admiration about his father, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, and his mother, the daughter of immigrants who fled Russia to work in New York City's Lower East Side garment industry. "When we were young, my parents certainly represented a good chunk of the Democrats living in that part of Colorado," Weil notes. "And my sisters and I were often the only Jewish kids in school. It's always left a deep impression on me that this country offered my family a place to come to when they needed it most."

Weil's adolescent experience at the Imperial Valley farm workers' strike brought the social justice ideals of his upbringing to the fore. "The work I did in California made it real," he says. After the strike, he took a high school equivalency exam, got accepted to UCLA and later transferred to Cornell's Industrial Labor Relations program, where he became interested in economics. After that, he went to Harvard — first for a master's degree, then a doctorate.

"My grandmother always predicted that I would be a professor, and I'd get so annoyed with that. I'd say, 'No, professors don't do anything, they just sit in their offices.' But I was wrong about that, and she had me pegged," he says, shaking his head and grinning. Weil says he's always felt a tension between doing academic research for the sake of acquiring knowledge, and engaging with practical applications for "problems that really matter."

Throughout his career he's always come back to labor market and workplace issues and the industrial relations system. Weil built his career writing about and researching workplace policies. He is perhaps best known in labor policy circles for his work on the growing trend among companies to subcontract, franchise and otherwise outsource their labor to ever-more distant workers, a phenomenon he terms "the fissured workplace" and explores deeply in a 2014 book of the same name.

For example, a hotel chain may franchise its brand to individual hotel owners, who in turn contract a cleaning company to run the hotel's housekeeping service. That service might then contract a laundering company to wash the linens. Since each actor in that chain takes a cut of the revenue from the original deal made with the hotel, there's less and less money available to properly compensate workers. Furthermore, since the workers are often contract employees, they're less likely to receive benefits, overtime pay or other protections.

The fissured workplace is contributing to ever-widening levels of inequality in the U.S., and its economic drivers often push employers to violate basic U.S. labor standards. Weil is interested in finding new ways to enforce labor laws that aren't just reactive but that root out the problem from its inception. In an ideal system, he believes, "We should prevent workers from experiencing wage theft or other abuses in the first place."

For that reason, he says, “I always maintained an applied part of my research, whether it’s advising government agencies, like the Department of Labor, or doing mediation work,” he notes. For many years, he advised the Labor Department and other agencies on their enforcement strategies.

Then, out of the blue, a phone call came from Washington, D.C.

“Someone I didn’t know, but who was working with the deputy secretary of labor, called me and asked, ‘Would you be interested in actually running this agency you’ve been studying?’ I thought about it for about a millisecond, and said, ‘Well of course I would.’”

The agency in question was the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor, which is charged with enforcing the United States’ most basic labor standards, including minimum wage, overtime pay and child labor laws. At the time Weil was asked if he’d accept a nomination as the agency’s administrator, the seat had been vacant for over a decade. Neither President Bush nor President Obama had managed to get an appointee through the grueling Senate confirmation process. Fortunately — despite taking an entire year, which Weil described as “torturous” — his appointment was confirmed in April 2014.



1. ON THE PICKET LINE WITH THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, CIRCA 1979 (RIGHT)

2. DAVID WEIL WITH STUDENTS AT HELLER (PHOTO BY LIZ LINDER PHOTOGRAPHY)

3. SPEAKING AT A WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION ROUNDTABLE MEETING, OCT. 14, 2014 (PHOTO BY SHAWN T. MOORE)





ATTENDING A WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING ON DEPARTMENT OF LABOR PRIORITIES WITH SECRETARY THOMAS PEREZ AND PRESIDENT OBAMA, FEB. 5, 2016. (OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA)

Leading the Wage and Hour Division gave Weil a more immediate view of the workplace policy problems he spent his career studying. “Millions of working people in this country are regularly deprived of some of the most basic standards assured by our law. That was something I knew intellectually, but going around the country and actually seeing it, from the vantage point of our investigators and from the workers themselves — that was something else entirely. Meeting with employers was impactful too — some of them were flouting the law, and others were just struggling to meet those same legal requirements. It was such an eye-opener.”

For nearly three years, Weil led the nearly 2,000-member agency. Under his leadership, it began making more targeted investigations of employers in industries that are prone to violations. In 2016, the Wage and Hour Division also released a landmark new rule that would make millions of workers newly eligible for overtime pay. And throughout his tenure as administrator of the agency, Weil pushed to increase the diversity of his own workforce to match that of the populations they serve. His motto as agency administrator was direct: “A fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.”

“That job gave me thicker skin,” laughs Weil, who left the agency at the end of President Obama’s second term in January 2017. It also taught him how to deal with very difficult policy decisions — and management decisions — in an environment with a wide array of stakeholder groups, both inside and outside the organization.

“That was invaluable to me, because it taught me new ways that you can bring a group of people together, look at very difficult problems and come to a solution, together,” he adds. “That’s something that I certainly hope to bring to my role as the dean of Heller, but also in my work as a researcher.”

Like any distinguished researcher, Weil cares about rigorous analysis, though he regularly speaks about tempering the scientist’s itch for more data with the need to actually use data to take action. As the dean of Heller, he first intends to listen to and speak with all of the community’s different stakeholder groups. Then he wants to help bring Heller “to the next level.”

Great ideas stay great ideas if you don't think about what it takes to implement them. Who are the stakeholders? How do you engage them?

“There’s a ton for me to learn, there’s so much great stuff happening here, and I need to fully understand all of it. I believe in having an inclusive listening process and building a common vision of where Heller is and where it could go. But once we do that, I’m a big believer in actually moving, and really making things happen,” he says.

Of Weil, Brandeis Provost Lisa Lynch says, “As a former Heller dean, I hold a very special place in my heart for the school. I am thrilled that Dean Weil has been selected to lead the school into its next chapter, and I feel confident that his experience as an accomplished scholar, teacher and public official makes him an ideal fit for the job.”

One of the issue areas where Weil feels Heller is ideally positioned to grow is inequality. “In a 2013 speech, President Obama described rising inequality as ‘the defining challenge of our time,’ and I think that’s exactly right,” he affirms. He goes on to point out that the U.S. is experiencing levels of inequality — across a variety of measures — unseen since the 1920s, just prior to the Great Depression.

“That’s a huge issue, and it’s not in any way a simple issue. It’s the result of multiple factors, and it manifests itself not just in wealth and income inequality, but in access to health care, differences in incarceration rates, opportunities to build skills in the labor markets, and the ability to retire with adequate savings — all of these factors, and many others, have been trending in the wrong direction for decades.” Between Heller’s 10 research centers and institutes, its seven academic degree programs and its rallying cry of “knowledge advancing social justice,” Weil believes the school is a natural convener for both national and international conversations on inequality and its solutions.

That means, in part, equipping Heller students with the skills and tools to engage with an issue like inequality: to analyze it, take it apart and examine it in a deep way. “That’s economic analysis, political science, sociology, organizational behavior,” he ticks off on his fingers. Those skills are important, he notes, but we then must decide what to do about the problem, and how to actually implement change.

“Very often, in public policy analysis, the desire is to have a bold policy solution. The danger is sometimes people don’t think a lot about how to make that happen. I learned in running the Wage and Hour Division: You have to think through those problems,” he stresses. “Great ideas stay great ideas if you don’t think about what it takes to implement them. Who are the stakeholders? How do you engage them? What are the obstacles that have thwarted dealing with the problem in the past, and how can you learn from that?”

After speaking with him for only an hour, it’s clear that Weil has high hopes — and high expectations — for Heller’s future. He speaks with great energy about the role Heller will continue to play in training the next generation of social change agents, and its potential to grow as a convener of research and advocacy around issues of social justice and inequality.

“I think Heller is a place that can uniquely bring people together to think about these issues, in creative ways and in impactful ways,” he urges. “When I had the opportunity to interview to be dean, I was really struck by this idea of ‘knowledge advancing social justice,’ and I found in my discussions with faculty, students, alumni and staff that it isn’t just words.”



CONNECTING THE DOTS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

BY TONY MOORE

FROM POLICING TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE TO RECIDIVISM AND RE-ENTRY, HELLER MPP RESEARCHERS AND ALUMNI STRIVE FOR CHANGE AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Turn on any news broadcast, scroll through any newsfeed or pick up any newspaper, and the troubling headlines are overwhelming: another controversial police shooting, surging incarceration rates among people of color, the latest inner-city drug raid. Increasingly, social justice problems overlap with criminal justice problems, and making a difference in either realm means digging beyond individual stories and attacking policy issues at their roots.

But how do you connect the dots between state regulations and a young mother facing jail time because she skipped a meeting with her parole officer to go to work? How do you link the latest sociological research with a black teenager who just got pulled over and is too scared to get out of his car? How do you avoid getting mired in the minutiae of politics, while also keeping sight of the people behind those troubling headlines?

As recent alumni can attest, these are exactly the questions the Heller School tries to answer in its master's in public policy (MPP) program.

“The program takes on social policy with a focus on expanding opportunity and understanding exactly how programs and policies impact people,” says Michael Doonan, PhD’02, associate professor and MPP program director. “What sets Heller apart is our focus on, and dedication to, using knowledge to advance social justice. We are not only strong in academic rigor but also in applying that rigor to address the most difficult social policy challenges.”

One graduate doing just that is Derek Lowry, MPP’16, a policy analyst for community initiatives, corrections and re-entry at the Council of State Governments’ Justice Center in New York. The challenge Lowry faces is a daunting one. Currently, the National Institute of Justice estimates that more than half of all released prisoners are re-arrested within a year of leaving prison. In three years, that figure shoots up to 67 percent. In five, it surpasses 75 percent. All of which is to say that you can’t tackle the U.S. mass incarceration problem without digging into the issue of re-entry and the host of systemic flaws that can turn even a short prison sentence into a lifetime relationship with the criminal justice system.

“The punishment doesn’t really end after an individual has served his or her time,” Lowry explains. “Instead, the punishment persists through the negative labeling affixed to them upon their release, the restrictions and taboos thrust on them when they return to their communities and the way the industry profits off their despair.”

To combat this persistent punishment, Congress passed the Second Chance Act (SCA) in 2008, which authorized federal grants for programs, nonprofits and reforms aimed at reducing recidivism. But laws alone don’t bring change. Getting the SCA to deliver means identifying how to best aid the re-entry process and fight recidivism.

That’s where Lowry comes in. Using research skills he honed at Heller, he works with organizations receiving SCA grants to identify evidence-based best practices and develop programs that most effectively help released prisoners re-integrate into society.



Heller faculty members are an incredible resource, and I finished the program with a more robust toolkit for analyzing and influencing policy decisions.

“Heller was incredibly instrumental in elevating my ability to work on criminal justice reform and systems reform,” says Lowry. “The program helped me adopt and cultivate a more nuanced perspective on several big issues — social welfare, education policy, private vs. public interest.”

In fact, Lowry’s most dynamic work — leading a countywide evaluation of an underperforming re-entry system in Buffalo, New York — is a direct outgrowth of his experience at the Heller School. That evaluation process has him tracing the flow of re-entry populations, identifying funding streams and analyzing how effective agencies, community organizations and nonprofits are at helping former prisoners find their footing — exactly the kind of work he learned to take on during his two years in the MPP program.

“I was made the lead on the project because of prior mapping work I’d done ... at the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy and because of a report I’d written for the Department of Education during a brief stint I had in the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education through a fellowship while still a student [at the Heller School],” he explains.

Like Lowry, fellow alumna Leah Sakala, MPP/MBA’17, is using her Heller education to fight inequality by addressing mass incarceration. As a research associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, she probes sentencing structures, corrections policy, and juvenile and criminal justice practices to support reforms that strengthen communities.

“Inequities in the criminal justice system are inherently linked with larger social, political and economic structures that limit opportunity,” explains Sakala, who was a senior policy analyst at the Prison Policy Initiative before

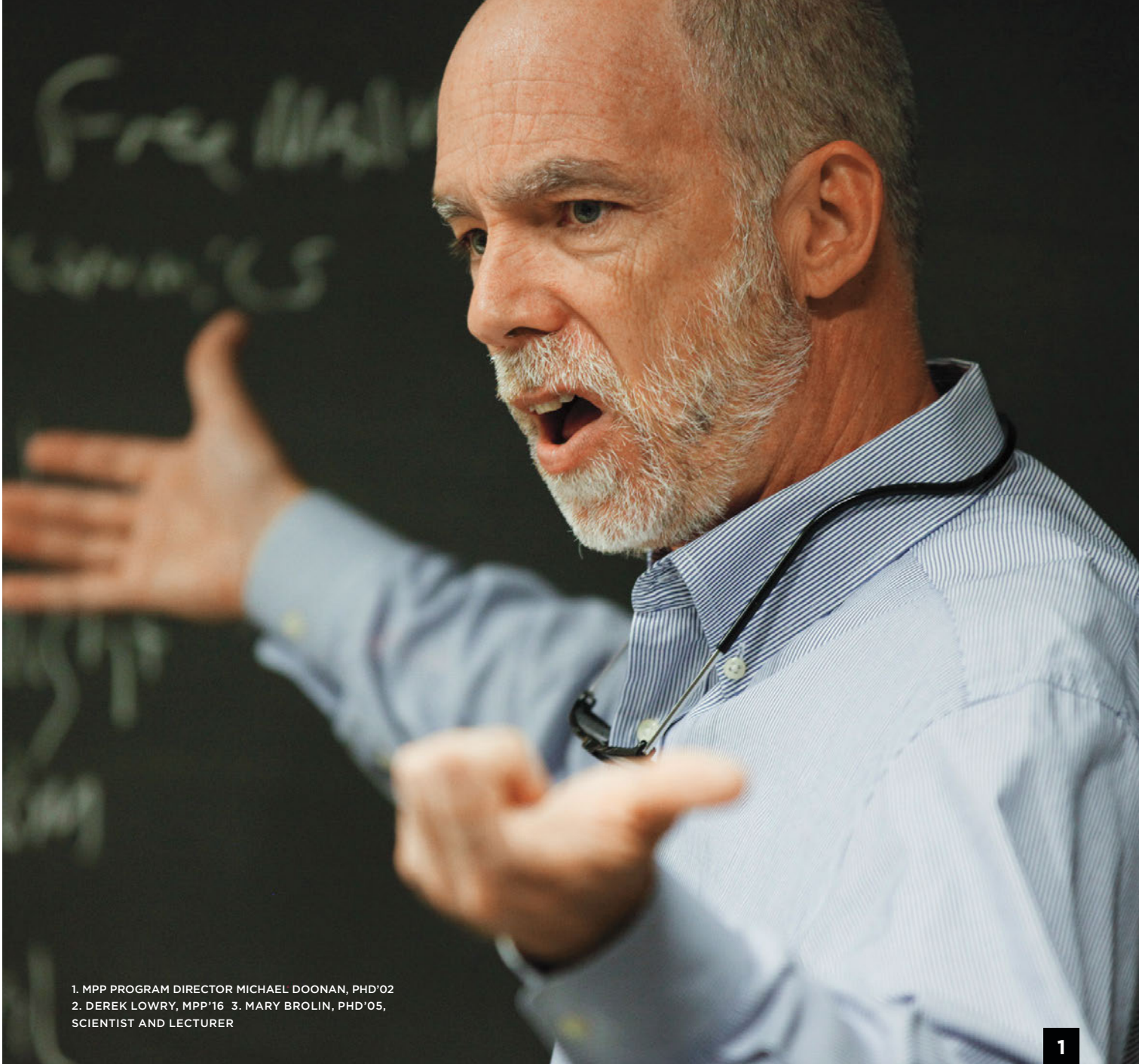
earning her dual master’s at the Heller School. “It’s clearer than ever that no policy issue exists in a bubble, and those of us working on improving social policy have to be ambitious about collectively identifying and addressing root causes.”

Sakala notes that courses like University Professor Anita Hill’s “Social Justice and the Obama Administration” challenged her to be bold and creative in envisioning solutions to social problems while remaining pragmatic and grounded about the policy changes needed to reach those solutions.

“Coming back to graduate school at Heller after working in the justice policy field for a few years was a great opportunity to take a step back and explore the intersections between criminal justice and other social policy spheres,” she says. “Heller faculty members are an incredible resource, and I finished the program with a more robust toolkit for analyzing and influencing policy decisions ... I draw on skills I honed just about every day.”

Sakala’s experience is fairly typical in the MPP program, where many students enroll in the Heller School to give them the tools to impact policy on a larger scale.

“The MPP program takes people who have some experience and a commitment to improving the world, gives them a strong foundation in policy analysis and builds their commitment to helping our most vulnerable populations,” says Mary Brolin, PhD’05, a scientist and lecturer who teaches the MPP capstone course. “Many of our students come in with experiences where they’ve helped people one-on-one. But they often realize they are at a disadvantage because of the larger systemic problems these individuals face. The Heller MPP program builds our students into professionals who can lead policy



1. MPP PROGRAM DIRECTOR MICHAEL DOONAN, PHD'02
2. DEREK LOWRY, MPP'16 3. MARY BROLIN, PHD'05,
SCIENTIST AND LECTURER

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changes that address these systemic barriers to impact larger populations.”

That was the case for Abigail Strait, MPP’16, who came to Heller after doing a post-college internship that involved working in a prison. At Heller, she honed her research and policy analysis skills while focusing on criminal justice with a concentration in poverty alleviation. Today, she is an associate at the Crime and Justice Institute, where she harnesses hard data to help states more effectively implement new criminal justice reforms.

“Heller’s MPP program helped me learn to think more critically about policy and helped me develop skills that have been essential in my job,” says Strait. “For example, I was never that interested in stats, but at Heller I learned how to think about, interpret and talk about statistics. This proved to be just what I needed postgraduation.”

This knack for connecting research and analysis with hands-on experience continues to draw students to the program. James Conlon, MPP’18, currently in his second year of the MPP program, has his sights set on becoming a policy director in the area of policing. His career goals include making police more accountable for their use of force and highlighting problems with questionable practices like “broken windows policing” and stop-and-frisk practices. Rather than looking to a traditional criminal justice master’s program, Conlon chose the Heller MPP for its holistic, interdisciplinary approach.

“I wanted an MPP from Heller because of its emphasis on intersectionality,” Conlon explains. “Criminal justice policy does not belong in a silo. At Heller, I can meet and network with students and faculty who have a wide range of interests closely linked to mine. ... I was drawn to Heller’s mission for social justice through data-driven research and advocacy.”

Conlon’s recent coursework and internship with the Inspector General’s Office in Los Angeles have given him a firsthand understanding of the many issues that intersect with criminal justice. After taking courses that discussed the

contemporary role of policy analysis and the stakeholders involved in policymaking decisions, Conlon took part in a police ride-along in South Los Angeles, conducted use-of-force investigations, penned a policy best practices report on Taser deployment, helped design a matrix for stop-and-frisks, and met with the city's chief of police and other key stakeholders in policing policy.

"Heller has opened doorways to me and given me the skills and confidence to help people through policy analysis," he says.

Just as important as those open doorways, however, are the people holding the doors open. As Conlon puts it, "Although the coursework may be important, faculty are just as critical to the student's individual learning process. ... The professors at Heller are passionate about their coursework and want to see students care too."

Lowry, Sakala and Strait agree, noting that interacting with faculty who are committed to social change helps them link their academic work with the wider world. For Lowry, that's epitomized in Visiting Professors Robert Kuttner and Deborah Stone.

"Both of them approach the work they do with a calm rationality and expert knowledge that I found inspirational every day," Lowry explains. "They allowed me to bounce my ideas off of them and guided me toward reading material that enhanced my beliefs, ethics and knowledge base."

Alumni also note an admiration for Brolin, who in addition to teaching in the program has worked in the substance abuse field for 27 years. Her work seeks to destigmatize alcoholism and addiction, reveal the flaws in the criminal justice system's approach to substance abuse, and increase opportunities for addiction screening and treatment. In recognition of her research, Brolin earned a Section Leadership Award from the American Public Health Association's Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Section and was a finalist in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Developing Leadership in Reducing Substance Abuse Program. At Heller, her work has also helped show students

how academic research can play a vital role in taking on national crises.

"Mary has been a leader in this field for the last two decades," says Doonan. "She is an invaluable resource not just to Heller and the MPP program but also to making progress on one of the most critical issues facing the nation."

As Brolin attests, she's far from the exception among Heller faculty, who all seek to connect their scholarship with relevant, real-world issues. "Our research does not sit on shelves," she says. "The faculty and research staff at Heller work closely with local, state and federal policymakers and practitioners so that we are asking cutting-edge questions and providing findings that are used to inform policies and program improvements."

As daily headlines remind us, these improvements are sorely needed. The statistics are startling. Over the last 40 years, the U.S. prison population has ballooned from roughly 500,000 to over 2.2 million. Today, though the U.S. accounts for only 5 percent of the world's population, it accounts for more than 20 percent of the global prison population. What's worse is that the prison population is far from an accurate representation of the country's racial makeup. The NAACP estimates that African Americans and Hispanics account for just over 30 percent of the U.S. population but over half of U.S. prisoners.

With mass incarceration and racial disparity so deeply entrenched in the system, there are no silver-bullet solutions. Making a difference means rolling up your sleeves and digging into the network of policy, implementation and regulatory issues that undergird the system itself.

"There is no single panacea that will help us chart a new course," Sakala says. "We need to press forward with policy and practice reform throughout and beyond the criminal justice system, ranging from policing and sentencing reform all the way to more equitable access to health care, living-wage jobs and affordable housing. The social and economic cost of maintaining the status quo is just too high."



623
PHONE

WORK AROUND

A social enterprise founded
by three Heller alumnae

BY BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17

“CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT
IT WOULD BE LIKE IF HALF
OF THE PEOPLE IN THE
UNITED STATES HAD TO
PACK UP AND MOVE TO A
NEIGHBORING COUNTRY?
DOCTORS, ENGINEERS,
TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND
ENTREPRENEURS, JUST
LIKE YOU?” SHE BEGINS.



SHADI SHEIKH SARAF REVIEWS DOCUMENTS AT THE WORKAROUND WORKSPACE AT MASSCHALLENGE

WORKAROUND PROVIDES ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO REFUGEES THROUGH ONLINE EMPLOYMENT: A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FOUNDED BY THREE HELLER ALUMNAE

Wafaa Arbash, MA SID/COEX'17, stands in front of her startup business partners, turns around and begins to practice her business pitch from memory. "Can you imagine what it would be like if half of the people in the United States had to pack up and move to a neighboring country? Doctors, engineers, teachers, students and entrepreneurs, just like you?" she begins.

"I can imagine, because I'm from Syria, where 11 million talented, educated, motivated people had to pack up and leave their country. And the problem is that now these people don't have access to jobs because they don't have connections to the local economy, just as you would if you had to leave your country. Meanwhile, small companies are always looking for cost-effective solutions to their repetitive, online tasks so they can focus on their strategy and long-term goals. WorkAround connects companies with online talent to complete these jobs. We save time and money, and provide quality services while giving people economic empowerment."

"Then I drop the mic," she grins, eliciting a laugh from her partners.

"That was great. One minute, seven seconds," says Shadi Sheikh Saraf, MA SID/COEX'17, looking at the timer on her phone. "You're so close."

"Yeah, I need to keep practicing," says Arbash.

"You've got the first part down, but the second half needs a little work," suggests Jennie Kelly, MA SID/MBA'17. They have a pitch competition coming up — a big one — and the winners get a prize of free airline miles.

Together, Arbash, Sheikh Saraf and Kelly have brought WorkAround out of the Heller classroom and into the real world. "WorkAround was born at Heller," laughs Arbash, a Topol Fellow in Nonviolence Practice, who first came up

with the idea while conducting her master's research. "I was thinking about what could be done to help refugees and displaced people. There are so many organizations doing a lot of good work to help refugees, but a lot of them focus on donating more and more aid, which is not a sustainable solution. I kept thinking about all of my friends and the people I know who left Syria, all of these people who are talented and educated and motivated to do something with their lives, but they're stuck.

"At the end of the day, what really matters is economic empowerment. I just felt like this was where we had to help people. At the same time, I found that companies are always looking for cost-effective solutions to their online repetitive tasks and jobs. It's expensive for them to hire someone here in the U.S. to do these jobs, so they outsource this work."

She started talking to people in the Boston business ecosystem, asking if they'd hire these people to do jobs like photo tagging, data entry, translation and transcription. They said yes, as long as the price is right and the work gets done. Then she started to research and confirmed what she suspected: According to the U.N., 75 percent of refugees in the Middle East and Northern Africa can access 3G Internet or faster, and 44 percent have at least some college education. "That's how this all started, by finding two problems that exist side by side and connecting them," she says.

Arbash quickly teamed up with Heller classmates Jennie Kelly and Shadi Sheikh Saraf and Brandeis undergraduate student Shai Dinnar '18 at the 2016 Heller Startup Challenge. The team developed Arbash's business idea into a more concrete plan, pitched it to a panel of judges and took home first prize.

After the Heller Startup Challenge, they participated in the Lean LaunchPad program at Brandeis University's Hassenfeld Family Innovation Center, where they refined their model and growth strategy and won a SPARK grant.

From international banking regulations and currency to building an appropriate online platform, the group has tackled each issue — and they remain standing.

Next, it was the Brandeis International Business School's three-day startup (3DS) challenge — they won that, too. Then they won the Kauffman Foundation's startup boot camp for entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups.

Those last two wins secured them a spot in the second round of judging at MassChallenge, a prestigious startup accelerator and competition located in downtown Boston. Of the 360 teams in round two, 128 moved forward as finalists, and WorkAround was one of them. Throughout their journey, the WorkAround team has navigated incredibly complex problems. From international banking regulations and currency to building an appropriate online platform, the group has tackled each issue — and they remain standing.

“Looking back over what we have achieved in less than a year, we've had some big wins,” says Arbash.

Heller MBA Program Director Carole Carlson agrees. “This team did outstanding work developing a great idea into an initiative that is poised to have real impact. What really impressed me was how well they leveraged resources and support at Heller and Brandeis to develop their concept. WorkAround is a great example of the kind of innovative high-impact social enterprise that can really make a difference, and we are thrilled that Heller was able to support the development of the organization,” she says.

“Being at MassChallenge has been great,” says Kelly, “because we all came from Heller, which has such an extensive community of support. If we had left Heller and tried to do this on our own, with no community, that would have been so hard. But being surrounded by other entrepreneurs who are going through similar things we're going through is worth its weight in gold.”

At present, WorkAround has relationships with several client companies who need to outsource repetitive, online tasks, such as providing human input for machine learning and artificial intelligence systems. They have also registered over 270 workers in their system — all of them refugees and displaced people from nine origin countries living in 30 new host countries.

“We haven't had to do a lot of outreach to workers,” says Kelly, who manages WorkAround's operations. Over 250 workers registered on their site as a result of a single Facebook post by Paper Airplanes, a partner organization that works with people affected by conflict. So far, they haven't had to advertise further.

“We're still working out the bugs right now, so we're not trying to attract more workers just yet. Once they register, they agree to some terms and fill out a quick survey that gives us a sense of their abilities. We then take that information and set people up to work on certain tasks. Once they're ready, they can log in to the platform and work as much as they want, whenever they want, as long as there is work to be done.”

Workers can always let the team know that they don't have time for a job this week, or if they really only want to do a certain type of work, such as translation. The system is set up to be completely voluntary and gives workers preference.

“It's great fun, but it's a lot of responsibility,” says Kelly.

“Being in touch with all of these people — they often tell me about their circumstances or why these jobs are so important to them, and I really feel like we have a responsibility for this business to succeed and keep providing them with work. People are depending on us.”

It's a lot of pressure, but it also makes the team proud to know that they're making a difference for people. “Instead of



THE WORKAROUND TEAM IN THEIR WORKSPACE AT MASSCHALLENGE

feeling like a burden to society, these people can use their skills and talents to be helpful to themselves and to the community that is hosting them,” says Sheikh Saraf, a Social Policy and Coexistence Fellow. “They have the skills and the talents, but they don’t have the opportunity. WorkAround gives them that opportunity, and helps them feel that they are someone, that they have dignity, that they are useful.”

At its present size, WorkAround is functional, but not profitable. “Right now, WorkAround needs full-time attention to grow and scale, but we also have to pay rent and buy food. We will need investment soon, or we’ll have to seek individual employment elsewhere and only work on this part-time, meaning that the business will not get as much attention from us,” says Arbash.

The team’s current goal is to successfully pitch to investors, which would allow them to work on the business full time and bring it up to scale. Outside funding would also allow them to automate a lot of their processes, hire back-end web developers to refine their online platform and abandon the third-party software they’ve been bootstrapping for their needs. They’re also working hard to attract more client companies, in order to provide a variety of steady work opportunities to their current pool of registered workers. One good sign, they note, is that nearly all of their current client companies are repeat customers. They’ve been happy with WorkAround’s services and willing to continue hiring their workers.

In October, Arbash carried the team to another monumental win: WorkAround won first place in the Beantown Throwdown, a prestigious startup competition held as part of HUBweek by the MIT Enterprise Forum of Cambridge. They outcompeted 11 other teams from local universities, including Harvard, MIT, Tufts and Boston University. The prize includes legal and marketing communications services and a guaranteed place at the MIT Enterprise Forum Cambridge Startup Spotlight event in June 2018.

With all of this positive feedback and the support they’ve gained from the Heller School and MassChallenge, Arbash and her team are optimistic that attaining outside investment is possible. She practices her pitch all the time — at every opportunity — and she’s confident that the WorkAround business model is strong. The team’s ultimate goal is to provide a reliable employment option for workers whose lives have otherwise been anything but stable, in a context that respects the dignity and valuable skills of refugees.

If the startup team is able to secure outside investment for WorkAround, Arbash says, “I’m 100 percent willing to take the risk. We know we can take this business to the next level. I know there’s potential here, and we’re not willing to turn our backs on these people.”



HELLER'S
HOMEGROWN
GLOBAL
AMBASSADOR

BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

RAVI LAKSHMIKANTHAN BUILDS CONNECTIONS FOR ALUMNI AROUND THE WORLD

Ravi Lakshmikanthan, MA SID'99, has a lot of Facebook friends ... and if you're a Heller alum who graduated within the past 20 years, there's a decent chance you're one of them.

Lakshmikanthan is Heller's assistant dean for academic and student services, but he may be just as well known as the school's unofficial social media envoy.

"It usually starts with job postings — every day, Heller alumni are posting them on platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook," Lakshmikanthan says. "Even though students may create their own Facebook groups, I'm still connected to them individually, and I'll share job opportunities with people who are outside of a particular group."

"Outside" is the operative word here. As Lakshmikanthan explains, social media is an ideal tool for connecting with alumni who are often mobile. Even if they frequently change addresses, alumni consistently check their social accounts and often list their current country within their profile information.

If Lakshmikanthan learns that a Heller alum is moving to a new region and would benefit from a local network, it's easy for him to search among his social audience for other alumni who are already there. Usually, he doesn't have to look very far.

"For example, I recently saw that an alum who I'm Facebook friends with posted a picture from Iraq," he says. "We had a recent graduate from Iran who was going to work in Iraq and didn't know anyone. I introduced them. Now, they're going to connect on the ground."

Lakshmikanthan, who is of Indian origin, knows the value of a good greeting, especially when someone is just arriving in a new part of the world. When he began working at

Heller two decades ago, he served as the program manager for the school's first globally focused degree program, the MA in Sustainable International Development (SID).

"Back then, we used to go to the airport and pick people up during orientation," Lakshmikanthan says. "Now we use a service, but we originally were making runs every day to meet people and bring them to Heller, because we felt it was one of the most important parts of welcoming someone to our community. Right from the beginning, we hoped that their bonds and ties to Heller were strong. Even today, when I meet alumni who graduated 10 or 15 years ago, they tell me that first trip to campus from the airport greatly impacted their Heller experience."

Personal connection is at the heart of Lakshmikanthan's philosophy when it comes to supporting students. It also connects with his doctoral research that is centered around internationalization, partnerships and collaboration in higher education. "An important part of being a welcoming community is acknowledging and understanding students' various challenges," he says. "We always treat the person as the number-one priority when we're dealing with any issues, be they academic, personal or professional. And we make sure to link them to the resources they need."

That support is critical for international students who may be coming to the United States for the first time and need to navigate the corresponding legal paperwork.

"The process changed significantly during my time here," Lakshmikanthan says. "The struggles that people have with visas and working. Twenty years ago it wasn't that hard — now it's much more difficult."

When he moved from the SID program into his current school-wide position, Lakshmikanthan took great pride in

They are so happy to have things from the place that they called home during an important time in their lives.

getting to know every student at Heller. He also cultivates and manages relationships with people and organizations outside of the school, in support of Heller's growing research and academic ambitions.

He describes the strategy for international outreach as an "all-encompassing kind of effort" that included partnering with large-scale sponsoring institutions, all the way down to the individual connections he fostered with alumni working in specific fields or companies.

"If I would go to a place like Cambodia or Indonesia, the first point of contact would be local alumni. I would ask them questions like: 'Who are you working with, and what would be good avenues for us given your knowledge of our programs and faculty? Where should we go, and who should we contact?' They were tying us in to the regional pipeline."

"When I go anywhere, reconnecting with local Heller community members and reminiscing with them about their time at Heller is important. They're happy to give back in terms of networking opportunities, organizational outreach and other services that we can't always measure in traditional ways."

As an example, Lakshmikanthan talks about a recent trip to Israel, where he introduced an alumnus who works for the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, based in Tel Aviv, to Israeli alumni who are working in related fields. "They included him in their local professional community. You see those connections being made, and they're lasting."

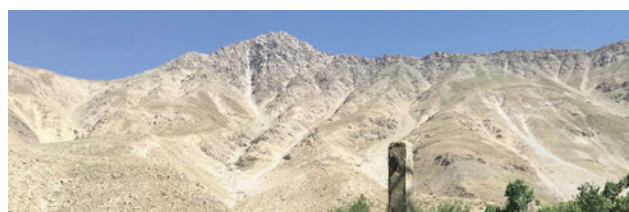
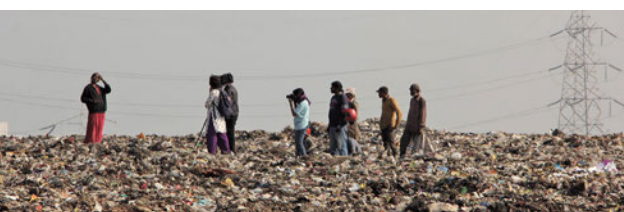
Lakshmikanthan is part of a much larger and comprehensive Heller alumni outreach system, of course, but sometimes it's the simple steps, like meeting people on his travels, which can be truly effective.

"Sometimes it takes somebody to spark those connections," he says. "Everyone is really busy in their work, and even though they think about it quite a bit, alumni have often told me that my visit is an excuse for them to reconnect both with Heller and each other because they get so absorbed in their daily lives."

Lakshmikanthan says the alumni he meets often speak of a favorite Heller faculty or staff member, or a significant experience they had collaborating with peers on a class project. In this way, he serves as a conduit to their memories of the Heller community. He also makes sure to bring along some Heller swag to reignite their institutional affinity.

"All the time — keychains or T-shirts. If they have children, I may bring clothes for the kids that have Brandeis or Heller on them, and there are always smiles and fond memories," Lakshmikanthan says. "They are so happy to have things from the place that they called home during an important time in their lives. They feel a strong connection to us in a lot of different ways. They are definitely our ambassadors."

A HANDFUL OF THE MANY PHOTOS OF HELLER ALUMNI THAT RAVI LAKSHMIKANTHAN HAS COLLECTED DURING HIS YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH



A woman with shoulder-length brown hair and glasses is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a dark blue blazer over a patterned scarf. Her hands are clasped together on a light-colored wooden table. The background shows a room with several red chairs and tables, suggesting a community center or meeting space.

HOMELESSNESS IS, FOREMOST, A HOUSING PROBLEM

Reflecting on my work on
homelessness in the U.S.

BY TATJANA MESCHEDE, ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE ON
ASSETS AND SOCIAL POLICY

A home not only provides a physical space in which to live. More importantly, perhaps, it provides security, roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a private place for emotional well-being. All of that is lost when a person becomes homeless. Even worse, society no longer recognizes homeless individuals as part of society. They become part of the landscape, a nuisance and a shameful reminder of the failures of our society.

Who, other than those people who have lost their home and the respect of society, can speak to what they need in order to leave homelessness behind? After working with homeless people for over two decades, I believe that, in addition to collecting quality data, it is critical for social scientists to speak with homeless people to learn how well interventions actually work and to implement better solutions to help them.

My path for doing this work began on my very first day on U.S. soil. That day in August 1988, I spent about three hours in downtown Los Angeles waiting for a bus to Orange County, where I was planning to spend the weekend with family friends. Having arrived the previous night from Germany, I was slowly and curiously taking in the new sights surrounding me. I noticed several people camping out at the bus station and began to wonder why anyone would do that. Then one of the women, probably in her 40s, came to me and asked me for money. Confused about why a woman that age would request money from a much younger person, I said, “Why do you ask me for money?” Her answer was, “Because I am homeless.”

I had never heard that term before. So I asked, “What do you mean by saying you are homeless?” “It means that I sleep on the streets,” she said. Sleeping on the streets in the richest nation on Earth? I was astonished. My next question was, “Why are you homeless?” At that point, the woman became clearly annoyed with me and said, “Are you giving me any money or not?” I really had no money to give, so my answer was no.

From that day forward, I asked many questions about homelessness whenever I had the chance, and I was

thrilled when I had the opportunity to join a research study on homeless shelter users when I moved to Boston two years later. That study began to answer the many questions I had about homelessness, providing some insights into the range of people using a homeless shelter. One man said he was kicked out of his house by his girlfriend and was working while in the shelter. Another guy had spent significant time on the streets. A third woman had mental health issues. But, I continued to ask, are these reasons to not have your own home?

We have come a long way since the 1980s, when homelessness was first recognized as a new social problem. Initially convinced that providing shelter, food and attending to other immediate needs would solve the problem, we soon had to admit that this did nothing to solve homelessness; in contrast, it grew. Federal funding through the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act was first made available in 1987, and expenses to solve the problem have increased ever since.

The next set of responses included establishing a continuum of care model in the 1990s in which homeless people had to prove themselves “housing ready” by moving from a shelter to transitional programs to housing. This predominantly treatment-focused approach left many homeless people behind. A new Housing First model in early 2000 for chronically homeless individuals finally addressed the most pressing, and obvious, need of homeless people: housing. This approach was also implemented for homeless veterans through the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, which significantly reduced the numbers of homeless veterans — in fact, ending veteran homelessness in some areas.

For homeless families, the Rapid Re-Housing model supports short-term rental expenses, from three months to two years. In geographic areas with extremely high rental costs, such as Boston, it is extremely challenging for families in Rapid Re-Housing to maintain their home after the short-term housing voucher expires. Some are

It is critical for social scientists to speak with homeless people to learn how well interventions actually work and to implement better solutions to help them.

lucky enough to access a long-term housing voucher. However, a third of households need support — waiting lists are long, and many in need have to manage without.

When these housing-focused approaches were first implemented, I was eager to learn how they worked for the people who participated in a number of evaluation projects I led. More recently, I began evaluating a new initiative that creates a targeted link for homeless families to access employment. So far, these approaches show positive results: After accessing housing, participants are healthier, as they can tend to their health needs, they are more connected to their families and other social networks, and, most importantly, they feel like part of society. Housing-focused approaches have successfully ended homelessness for many through cost-effective measures, and access to employment prevents shelter re-entry for a number of formerly homeless families.

While quality, person-level data are critical to better understanding the scope and pathways in and out of homelessness, we can also learn much about the experience of people in need of homeless services. In almost all of the research projects I've conducted, input from homeless clients has been an integral part of my work. Over the years, I have spoken with hundreds of people experiencing homelessness, including youth, the elderly, families, men, women and those not conforming to a traditional gender binary.

It's evident that homeless people bring a different perspective to the field. In my early work with homeless street dwellers in Boston, their assessment of service needs stood in stark contrast to that of their service

providers. While people on the street knew they needed housing to get off the street, service providers stressed the need for health and substance abuse services. The Housing First model has since taken the voices of homeless street dwellers seriously and continues to provide a place for them to live before addressing their other service needs.

Homeless people also have a lot to teach the public, among whom there is widespread belief that the homeless choose to live on the streets. Again, when you talk to people on the street, their voices tell a different story.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WHAT INDIVIDUALS HAVE TOLD ME:

"I never thought I would be homeless."

"The biggest challenge living on the streets is being safe. People are always robbing and stealing."

"It's a zoo out there, absolutely crazy! I get \$550 per month in Social Security income. I buy food and clothing, and I rent a room in a motel for as long as it lasts."

"It takes a lot of work to conceal that you are homeless."

THIS IS WHAT INDIVIDUALS TOLD ME AFTER MOVING INTO A ROOM THROUGH HOUSING FIRST:

"I was crying [with joy] all night when I moved into my own room."

"I thought I would never be able to have my own room again."

Mothers in Rapid Re-Housing, even though they are supported only by a temporary housing voucher, share the same sentiment. “Housing gives me the opportunity to feel like I’m somebody and I’m doing right. It’s a return to normalcy.”

Their openness to share very personal stories with me both humbles me and provides me with ammunition to continue this work. As a society, we have tinkered with this problem, unable or unwilling to recognize that homelessness is, first and foremost, a housing problem, not a mental health, substance abuse or other related problem. The data are clear: When we use a housing-based approach, such as Housing First or the HUD-VASH program, we significantly reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. When you ask homeless people themselves, that’s exactly what they answer: I need a secure place to live.

Homelessness as we know it today did not exist some 30 years ago. Steep rises in housing costs, stagnating wages, and cuts in our mental health, substance abuse and welfare systems all contributed to the rise of homelessness among our fellow citizens. In 1948, the U.S. adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services.” It is time that we as a nation implement this vision.



JOSEPH WRONKA'S CAREER IN HUMAN RIGHTS

BY COURTNEY LOMBARDO

Joseph Wronka, PhD'92, has spent his career advocating for underrepresented populations and researching and advancing human rights policy around the world. He served as a representative to the United Nations in Geneva for the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) for roughly a decade and as a professor of social work at Springfield College for 25 years. Wronka was initially inspired by his father to develop a humanistic way of thinking and acting in his life. He was also encouraged by Heller Professor David Gil to undertake the task of reading and comparing federal and state constitutions to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which then motivated his dissertation topic.

The Universal Declaration asserts that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” In Wronka's most recent publication, “Human Rights and Social Justice: Social Action and Service for the Helping and Health Professions” (Sage, 2017), he presents, among other things, a comparison of that U.N. document with U.S. federal and state constitutions. “Freedom of speech can be a facade, because often only the voices of the rich are heard,” says Wronka. “In the spirit of Louis D. Brandeis, wherein states ought to act as ‘laboratories of democracy’ to extend rights not found in the federal constitution, the only other right repeatedly mentioned in state constitutions is education. We are teaching people the U.S. Bill of Rights, an important document certainly, but ultimately we're teaching the wrong things.”

“Employment, health care, security in old age and peace, for example, are human rights, and an educated layperson's reading of those documents reveals that they are neither in the federal constitution nor state constitutions. In part, our emphasis on the U.S. Bill of Rights has led to American exceptionalism that we are the greatest in human rights, but we're not. Ultimately, we are prisoners of our past, because of the lack of constitutional fiat for social, economic, cultural and solidarity rights.”

Wronka's experience is both domestic and global. He has given presentations and produced policy briefings as an IASSW representative and currently also represents the People's Decade for Human Rights Education at the U.N. in New York City. He has also spoken at U.N. events about the intimate connection between the right of self-determination and the eradication of extreme poverty, often emphasizing minority groups, including indigenous populations who have been denied the right to self-determination. Wronka adds, “Indigenous populations in Alaska, and other groups, are victims of American imperialism and capitalism. Their right to self-determination has been violated, and they really can't determine their own destiny. The U.S. government had stated that it feels the term of right to self-determination is too strong, and that it should be the right to self-management of resources. The indigenous people think this is nonsense. Their culture is about more than managing resources.”

Wronka continues to work in various United Nations forums both domestically and abroad and will continue fighting for the creation of a human rights culture, which he describes as “a lived awareness of human rights principles in our minds and hearts and dragged into our everyday lives.”



JOSEPH WRONKA

PUSHPITA SAMINA SHARES THE VALUE OF AN MS DEGREE IN BANGLADESH

BY **COURTNEY LOMBARDO**

Pushpita Samina, MS'15, is the clinical services lead (Foreign Service National) in the Office of Health, Population, Nutrition and Education for USAID Bangladesh, where she is responsible for providing technical support on improving the quality of health care services in Bangladesh and monitoring the implementation of quality-related activities of USAID-funded projects. In her current role, her knowledge of strengthening health systems, health economics and financing is critical to providing technical support related to universal health care in Bangladesh. After graduating, Samina was an intern for mHealth at Mercy Corps in Tajikistan, where she designed logical frameworks and strategies. She then became a consultant with Abt Associates in Bangladesh with a focus in health finance governance. Before USAID, she received a prestigious fellowship with the World Health Organization (WHO) representing Bangladesh, at which she was trained on monitoring and evaluating the progress of eliminating neglected tropical diseases in the region.

Samina feels that the Heller MS program prepared her well for her current position. “The comprehensive coursework in the MS program introduced me to different aspects of health systems strengthening, from the basics of health economics to global health systems and so on. The course content was so rich that even now I refer back to the reading materials to produce technical documents or to design a project. The career development counselors, professors and alumni helped me to network with professionals and to explore different career opportunities. The international diversity in the classroom also helped me to learn new things from different

parts of the world that I apply in my work today. It also prepared me to work in a diverse team environment.”

The brand and quality of a Brandeis University and Heller School for Social Policy and Management education is known worldwide, Samina adds. “When I was hired, my office director made a comment to me that, ‘I know Brandeis folks can do anything and everything, so I have confidence in you.’ I think it is true in many ways. My short stay at Brandeis, and especially at Heller, has developed my technical capacity to make a deep dive in any health systems problem and to find a solution for it.”

She fondly remembers her BOLLI family and receiving support from the Heller School and the Heller Annual Fund to purchase books and to attend a conference. Her Heller education was the impetus for propelling her career forward and helping her “grow, explore and be confident” in the world.

NICOLE MCCAULEY IS POWERING BUSINESS BY EMPOWERING PEOPLE

BY **MAX PEARLSTEIN '01**

Consulting firm Deloitte has a motto for its human capital division: “Business led, people driven.” Human capital refers to the talents, competencies and intellect of an organization’s workforce. It values employees because of the unique combination of knowledge and skills they each bring to the company, and in recognizing that they can take their value with them if they leave, it focuses on workers’ well-being.

Meeting business objectives while cultivating employee motivation and fulfillment can be a task. In her role as



TOP:
PUSHPITA SAMINA
BOTTOM:
NICOLE MCCAULEY



ALEXANDRA BASTIEN

an analyst with Deloitte’s human capital division, Nicole McCauley, MBA’16, advises clients in the federal government on people-focused programs and projects, like stakeholder engagement, communications and change management efforts, which can often take a delicate approach, especially in complex environments.

Since joining Deloitte shortly after graduating from Heller, she has worked with large-scale organizations, including the United States Postal Service and the Department of Defense. As an analyst, she spends much of her time learning to anticipate various client needs and filling gaps on project teams wherever assistance is required.

McCauley, an Ellen H. Block Fellow, credits the Heller MBA program’s Team Consulting Project experience as great preparation for the multifaceted role. “I’m very confident interacting with clients, meeting tight deadlines and working with a diverse set of colleagues to provide high-quality work,” she says. “Heller also gave me a grounding in how to ‘manage up’ and steer difficult conversations.”

Those are useful skills for anyone, McCauley stresses, but they are critical for consultants who often work with more senior clients. In her work with the U.S. Postal Service, for example, she helped lead communications efforts around a large technology adoption process. She created a series of executive briefings, PowerPoint decks and other creative materials for high-level administrators.

“Consulting with a large corporation was not something I ever anticipated doing, but my Heller MBA gave me an excellent platform to start with,” she says.

The MBA program also contributed to her personal development — which would make any human capital champion proud. As McCauley explains, “Heller taught me to be bold in my thinking and ideas, giving me the confidence to push for change in the workplace as much as in my personal life.”

ALEXANDRA BASTIEN’S CAREER IN EQUITABLE ASSET-BUILDING

BY **BETHANY ROMANO, MBA’17**

“I didn’t know I was going to become super passionate about asset building when I came to grad school,” said Alexandra Bastien, MPP’12, in a career talk with current Master of Public Policy students. “Literally in my first class at Heller, which was with Janet Boguslaw, I learned this language around asset building, the racial wealth gap and the hidden welfare state. It was an amazing experience.”

Since graduating from Heller in 2012, Bastien launched a career focused on equitable economic growth and race and gender equity. First she participated in the Proteus Fund Fellowship for Diversity in Philanthropy, where she held dual placements at the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation and the Davis Family Foundation. “They’re both small, family foundations with big endowments. It was a great experience for me to do that for a year,” she says.

After the fellowship, Bastien accepted a position as a program associate at PolicyLink in Oakland, California. Initially her work focused on the organization’s national initiative to build economic security over a lifetime. “My job was to provide direct technical assistance to coalitions working at the state level, particularly in the South,” says Bastien. “I spent a lot of time traveling around the South, working with coalitions around payday loans, which are incredibly problematic. That work was challenging. It taught me that policy doesn’t always translate to the impact it should have on the ground.”

Today in her work at PolicyLink, Bastien helps elevate policy solutions to the racial wealth gap, economic mobility, and the inequitable distribution of fines and fees in the

criminal justice system. She works with the Tax Alliance for Economic Mobility, whose mission is to advance equity and reduce poverty. “We meet quarterly and discuss the asset-building budget of the tax code, which includes the billions of dollars that go back to households in the form of tax credits and deductions. Those funds are incredibly skewed toward wealthy households,” says Bastien.

Of her time at Heller, Bastien notes three things that helped her advance her career. “First, being able to talk concretely about how our policy structures actually directly impact the finances of households. Second, Mike Doonan’s infamous ‘road map’ and the strong presentation skills I learned in the MPP program. And third, at Heller I practiced and built experience at calling out policy issues that affect people of color, which has been very important to me in my work.”



BACK COVER(AGE)

About two minutes into the conversation, it dawned on me that he never bothered to put this off the record. I was just stunned that the conversation went on and on and on.

ROBERT KUTTNER IN THE WASHINGTON POST ON HIS UNSOLICITED INTERVIEW WITH STEVE BANNON

Strange as this may seem, research has shown that many people prefer “strong and wrong” leaders to “weak and right” leaders.

MARI FITZDUFF IN ALTERNET ON PRESIDENT TRUMP'S SUPPORTERS

We still have high spending rates, we still have populations that really can't afford their insurance — but we're headed in the right direction.

STUART ALTMAN IN THE BOSTON GLOBE ON MASSACHUSETTS' HEALTH CARE COSTS

Really, the problem devolves from the retail prices being set far too low in terms of what's being paid to players in the supply chain.

DAVID WEIL ON NPR'S "THE TAKEAWAY" ON U.S. GARMENT INDUSTRY SWEATSHOPS
